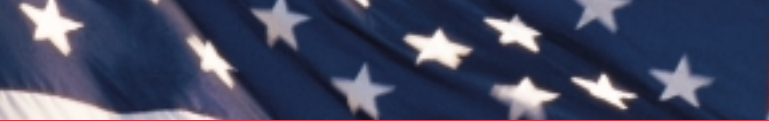




# Vote Virginia!

*“People often say that, in a democracy, decisions are made by a majority of the people. Of course, that is not true. Decisions are made by a majority of those who make themselves heard and who vote – a very different thing.”*

Walter H. Judd



*The opportunity to participate in the democratic process is a basic right, yet many Americans with disabilities face barriers to exercising this right. This pamphlet is intended to offer Virginians with disabilities information about the following:*

- ★ How and where to register to vote;
- ★ Voter registration requirements;
- ★ Where to vote;
- ★ Voting rights and responsibilities; and
- ★ Special considerations for Virginia voters with disabilities.

## Who May Register to Vote?

To be eligible to vote in Virginia, you must meet all of the following criteria:

- ★ Be a resident of Virginia;
- ★ Be a U.S. citizen;
- ★ Be 18 years of age or older;
- ★ Do not claim the right to vote in any other State;
- ★ If convicted of a felony, your voting rights must have been restored.; and
- ★ You must not be formally declared “mentally incompetent” by a court of law.

## Registration Deadlines for Virginia

You can register to vote anytime of the year. However, to vote in any upcoming election, your application must be received by your local registration office or by the State Board of Elections by the following deadlines:

Election Type	Registration Deadlines
General and Primary Elections	29 days before election
Special Elections	13 days before election



## How to Register to Vote

You can register by completing voter registration forms which are available at many locations throughout the state. Applications can be submitted using either a Virginia or a National voter registration application form. Forms may be mailed to the following address:

**State Board of Elections  
200 N. 9th St., Suite 101  
Richmond, VA 23219**

You can register to vote by mail or in person at any voter registration site. Additionally, both the National and Virginia Registration Application forms can be downloaded on any computer with Acrobat™ Adobe Reader installed on it.

Federal Voter Registration Applications can be found on the website of the Federal Election Commission at:

**<http://www.fec.gov/votregis/vr.htm>**

The website for Virginia Voter Registration Applications is:

**<http://www.sbe.state.va.us>**

## Where to Obtain Registration Forms and Register in Person

Applications for voter registration are available at many locations across the state. Additionally, groups and organizations, including non-profit agencies, may conduct voter registration drives, as long as these activities do not try to influence votes.

***Virginians may register to vote at following locations:***

- ★ **Local voter registration offices**  
(see “voter registration” or “registration” in the local government section of your phone book);
- ★ **Dept. of Motor Vehicles Office;**
- ★ **Armed Forces recruitment offices;**
- ★ **Dept. of Game & Inland Fisheries Office;**
- ★ **Public libraries;**
- ★ **State Board of Elections Office; and**
- ★ **Virginia Employment Commission Offices.**



***Additionally, the following state agencies are voter registration sites:***

- ★ Dept. for the Blind & Visually Impaired;
- ★ Virginia Centers for Independent Living;
- ★ Virginia Office for Protection & Advocacy;
- ★ Dept. of Health;
- ★ Dept. of Mental Health, Mental Retardation & Substance Abuse Services (state hospital, training centers, and local community services boards, or public mental health centers);
- ★ Dept. of Rehab. Services;
- ★ Dept. of Social Services; and
- ★ Dept. for Deaf & Hard of Hearing.

## Voter Identification (ID) Requirements in Virginia

In order to vote, you must have proper identification, which includes the following:

- ★ Virginia voter identification card;
- ★ Valid Virginia driver's license;
- ★ Military ID;
- ★ Any Federal, state or local government-issued ID;
- ★ Employer issued photo ID card; and
- ★ Social Security Card. (You must have a social security number to register. This number is kept confidential, and will be used only for voter registration, and for jury selection purposes by courts.)

If you forget to bring ID to the polls, you can still vote, but you will be asked to sign an “Affirmation of Identification” statement that verifies your identity. ***If you need help voting because you have a disability or if you cannot read or write, you can also receive help completing this statement.***

If you are registering and/or voting for the first time in a federal election, the federal ***Help America Vote Act of 2002 (HAVA)*** requires you to show identification if you did not send a copy of your ID with your registration application. Any of the following types of ID are acceptable:

- ★ A current and valid photo ID (driver's license, for example);  
OR
- ★ A current utility bill, bank statement, government check or paycheck that shows name and address;  
OR
- ★ Another government document that shows name and address (a voter card, for example).

***This new federal ID requirement applies the first time a person votes in any federal election, either on the day of the election or by absentee ballot.*** If you do not have one of these forms of ID at the polls, you can still vote, but you must cast a “Conditional Ballot.” This paper ballot is reviewed the day after the election, and the local electoral board will count it if you are found qualified to vote and if you voted at the correct poll.

If you register by mail, be sure to send a photocopy of any form of identification listed above.

# How to Know if Your Voter Registration Application has been Approved

You should receive a voter registration card within three weeks after you register. If you do not receive this card, call your local voter registration office to ask about your application.

If your application has been denied, you will receive a written notice. If you would like to appeal the denial of your voter registration, you may file a “Petition for Appeal of Denial of Virginia Voter Registration” form with the circuit court in your locality.

## Where to Vote

*There are three ways to find out where to vote:*

- ★ **Your Voter Registration Card will provide the location of where you vote;**
- ★ **You can call your local Voter Registration Office, listed in the blue government pages of your telephone book;**
- ★ **You can contact the State Board of Elections by telephone, or by viewing their website.**

## Conditional Ballots

A Conditional or “Provisional” Ballot can be cast by a voter if there are problems proving that person is actually registered to vote or if proper identification documents are not available. A Conditional Ballot is a paper ballot that you fill out and it is sealed in a green envelope. You may ask for help in completing the information on both sides of the envelope. You must provide information requested and sign a “Statement of the Voter.”

Conditional Ballots are not counted on Election Day. Your local Electoral Board will meet the day after the election to determine whether each conditional voter was qualified to vote. The votes of qualified voters will then be counted and included in the results for your locality.

If you are a Conditional Voter, you may be present when the Electoral Board determines if your vote was valid. The election officials must tell each conditional voter when and where the Electoral Board will meet, and provide a phone number to call to find out if their conditional ballot was counted.

## Absentee Ballots

Absentee voting is a way to vote by mail. Absentee voting allows people to participate in elections even if they are not able to go to the polls on Election Day. There are a number of reasons for some people to participate in elections by absentee ballot. Some of these reasons include the following:

- ★ **If a person is unable to go to the polls on Election Day because of a disability or illness;**
- ★ **If a person is unable to go to the polls because he/she is primarily and personally responsible for the care of a disabled or ill family member who is home-bound.**



For more information about voters who qualify for absentee ballots, contact your local voter registration office, or the State Board of Elections.

## How to Apply For and Cast Your Vote with an Absentee Ballot

***You can apply for an absentee ballot only if you are already registered to vote.*** Contact your local Voter Registration Office to request an application.

An absentee ballot application can also be downloaded on your computer, at <http://www.sbe.state.va.us> . You must have Adobe™ Acrobat Reader installed on your computer to read or print the application, and you can install it free of charge at the Board of Election website, if you do not already have this program.

You may return the application by mail, electronic or telephone transmission, or fax machine, if one is available at the local registration office. The absentee ballot application must be received at your local Voter Registration Office by the Thursday BEFORE Election Day, in order for you to receive a ballot by mail in time to vote.

If you apply for an absentee ballot in person at the local registration office, you must apply at least three days before the election.

If you vote in an election by absentee ballot, the Electoral Board must receive your completed ballot by 7:00 p.m. on Election Day or it cannot be counted.

## Highlights of Virginia Voter Rights and Responsibilities:

### **RIGHTS:**

- ★ To be treated with courtesy and respect by election officials;
- ★ To be notified if your registration has been accepted or denied;
- ★ To get help from election officials if you are unsure about the voting process;
- ★ To be shown how the voting equipment works;
- ★ To have a ballot brought to your vehicle instead of entering the polling place if you are 65 years of age or older, or if you are disabled. You may have an officer of election or another person help you vote if you are physically disabled or unable to read or write. Blind voters may have any person assist them. Other voters may have anyone who is not their employer help them; and
- ★ To be allowed to vote even if you do not have identification with you at the polling site. You must sign an “Affirmation of Identity” statement before voting if you have no ID.

**Exception:** Voters who registered by mail on or after January 1, 2003, **AND** did not mail in a copy of their identification at that time, **AND** who failed to show one of the federally required forms of ID when voting for the first time in a federal election, must vote by **Conditional Ballot**. They may not use the “Affirmation of Identify” statement.

## **RESPONSIBILITIES:**

- ★ To treat election officials with the same courtesy and respect they must give you;
- ★ To show a valid identification document (ID);
- ★ To ask for help. For example, if you do not know how to use voting equipment, or need help casting your ballot because of a physical disability or inability to read or write;
- ★ To make sure your ballot is correct **BEFORE** casting it. You cannot cast another ballot, even if you think you have made a mistake, once a ballot has been cast; and
- ★ To ask the election official to call the General Registrar's office **BEFORE** you leave the polling place if you have problems regarding your eligibility to vote or the casting of your vote.

## **Special Considerations for Voters with Disabilities**

*The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)* requires public agencies to provide reasonable help for people with disabilities to benefit equally from services offered. If you need help due to a disability in order to register or to vote, special help must be available unless it would create an undue burden. You should ask for accommodations ahead of time, to the extent possible.

*Help for people with disabilities at the polls can include the following:*

- ★ An explanation of instructions in simpler language;
- ★ A friend or family member to accompany the individual into a voting booth;
- ★ Assistance in casting a ballot; and
- ★ Ballots that are available to individuals with visual impairments.

*In Virginia, a person has a right to vote unless he/she has been found legally incompetent by a circuit court, and his/her competency has not been restored. Additionally, a person convicted of a felony loses the right to vote unless the Governor has restored his or her rights.*

*No one should be prevented from voting simply because he or she has been involuntarily committed to a psychiatric hospital – in the past or present. And, even people who have legal guardians appointed for them do not lose their right to vote unless they are found legally incompetent by a circuit court judge.*

*Many patients in public psychiatric hospitals have a right to vote. So do residents in training centers, rehabilitation centers, and more. Voter registration activities are in place to help people register to vote in state facilities like these.*

***Where to Report Rights Violations and Complaints:***

**If you believe your voting rights have been violated,  
or that you may have witnessed an election law  
being broken, contact the following:**

**State Board of Elections at 1-800-552-9745,  
TDD 1 -800-260-3466, or by Email at  
*info@sbe.virginia.gov*.**

**The Virginia Office of Protection and Advocacy at  
804-225-2042 (Voice/TTY), Toll-Free at 1-800-552-3962  
(Voice/TTY), or by Email at *generalvopa@dsa.state.va.us***

***Information available in  
alternative formats upon request.***

***This pamphlet was prepared by:***



**NAMI-Virginia  
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***Courtesy of:*  
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[www.vopa.state.va.us](http://www.vopa.state.va.us)**

**Protecting, advocating, and promoting rights, independence,  
choice and self-determination for people with disabilities**